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ADVOCATES LAUNCH CHILD ABUSE PREVENTION PUSH

Illinoisans urged to "Give, Volunteer and Act" to ensure kids are safe

(CHICAGO) – The Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) is joining forces with Prevent Child Abuse Illinois, local nonprofits and elected officials to encourage everyday Illinoisans to join efforts to prevent child abuse across Illinois. An estimated 125,000 Illinois children are abused or neglected each year, and one in five kids are abused before age 18. DCFS receives, investigates and acts upon a report of child abuse or neglect every five minutes, child sex abuse every two hours, and a child death by abuse or neglect every day-and-a-half. DCFS Director Richard H. Calica says that while many across Illinois are doing their part to ensure safe, loving homes for kids, more can be done.

"As many as 100,000 victims of abuse and neglect go unreported to our hotline each year, taking a terrible toll on them, their futures, and the future of every community in Illinois," said Calica. "Today, we remind every Illinoisan that they have a social responsibility to keep kids safe by acting to report suspected abuse and neglect."

"In the long run, the best solution, the only fiscally and socially responsible solution, is to prevent abuse before it starts," added Calica. "Thousands of human services organizations, religious groups, after school programs and others are working every day to support families in providing a nurturing, safe environment for kids. We thank the more than one million Illinoisans supporting these efforts and encourage all to join them by volunteering and giving to support their work throughout the year."

Cynthia Stringfellow, Vice President of Ounce of Prevention Fund, applauded the more than 1.3 million Illinois families that give to charity each year, including more than \$780 million donated to human service organizations that promote safe, loving homes and brighter futures to kids by providing a wide array of services to families in communities across Illinois. Children under age five are at greatest risk for abuse and neglect, and Stringfellow notes that early childhood programs have proven particularly effective in preventing abuse and neglect.

(more)

“Early childhood programs not only improve academic success, they also provide children with social and emotional skills that strengthen families,” says Stringfellow. “Combined with visiting nursing programs and other targeted services, we can help protect a family against abuse and neglect as sure as immunizations protect against the flu. We hope more Illinoisans will join their neighbors and friends by giving this year to nonprofits working in their community and across Illinois.”

Rogers Jones of Community Assistance Programs, Inc. is among the more than one million Illinoisans who volunteer their time each year as a mentor, tutor or coach to children. With more than three decades of experience, he says that volunteering as a mentor ensures that children are well-nurtured and that the next generation of parents has the skills to raise their own children in a safe, loving home.

“When you show a child or a teenager that you care about them, you are teaching them how to be caring and loving adults when they grow up,” says Jones. “Four hours may not seem like much time to many people, but when you take that four hours a week or four hours a month and multiply it by more than one million volunteers, that adds up to a big difference in our communities.”

“Working together, we can prevent child abuse,” agreed Amy Gregorio, former Mrs. Illinois and a longtime advocate against child abuse. “Everyone needs to do their part, whether as a family member, a neighbor or friend, or as volunteer or community or elected leader. Ensuring children are safe and loved has to be our top priority.”

Roy Harley of Prevent Child Abuse Illinois (PCAI) presented this year’s “Child Abuse Prevention Community Campaign Award” to one organization that is taking action to prevent child abuse in the Chicago area. Each year, PCAI honors three organizations across the state working to prevent child abuse in their communities by bringing together organizations to educate parents and the public. This year’s winner in the Chicago region is Blue Kids Lake County, which is leading a public education campaign in Lake County, where an estimated 7,600 kids are abused or neglected each year.

“Effective child abuse programs succeed because of strong partnerships between parents, social service agencies, religious organizations, schools, businesses and government. Blue Kids Lake County exemplifies that effort,” says Harley. “We all have a shared responsibility and a shared interest to promote the common good by ensuring safe, loving homes for kids. By acting together, we can prevent child abuse and achieve that goal.”

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